**Accessible formats for public examinations**

**January 2023**

This statement should be read alongside RNIB’s other

This statement should be read in the context of the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the 2015 statutory guidance, ‘[SEND Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25): 0 to 25 years’.

This statement is supported by VIEW, the professional association for the vision impairment workforce.

## What we think

Equal access to examinations and qualifications forms an essential part of the entitlement of children and young people with vision impairment to high quality educational outcomes.

Access to general qualifications for disabled candidates is covered by the Equality Act 2010. Under the Act, general qualification bodies are required to make reasonable adjustments to examination arrangements and to avoid unfavourable treatment towards disabled candidates.

We maintain that the range of accessible exam formats provided by the awarding bodies should be extended to reflect the varying format requirements of blind and partially sighted candidates. At the same time, it is important that schools and colleges are fully aware of any limits to current provision in order that they can prepare their candidates accordingly.

## What’s the current issue

Currently some blind and partially sighted candidates struggle to access exam papers because these are provided in a limited range of formats which do not reflect their usual way of working. This constitutes a barrier to their attainment which may be unrelated to their knowledge and understanding of the subject content.

In addition to a range of large print and braille hard copy formats, the main awarding bodies also offer non-interactive electronic question papers in PDF format for candidates who prefer to read on-screen. However, many of these papers have not been designed to be accessible with assistive software such as screen readers. The responsibility lies with schools and colleges to ascertain whether the electronic papers available are compatible with the software used by their students.

## Recommendations

We believe that the current situation disadvantages some blind and partially sighted candidates. The aim should be to achieve continuity between classroom practice and exam provision from when testing in education begins through to leaving education. The following steps should be taken to achieve this:

* Awarding bodies and JCQ (Joint Qualification Council) should work with relevant organisations such as the UK Association of Accessible Formats (UKAAF), RNIB, OfQual and British Dyslexia Association (BDA) to agree and implement accessibility standards for electronic PDF question papers as a matter of urgency.
* Awarding bodies should actively engage with schools and colleges on the format requirements of any candidates whose normal working methods cannot reasonably be matched by the standard range of accessible formats they currently provide.
* Schools and colleges should prepare their students so that their normal method of working matches as closely as possible the range of accessible formats which awarding bodies are able to provide.
* Schools and colleges should regularly review the access arrangements and modified formats used by students, to ensure they are always using the most appropriate arrangements.
* Past papers in accessible formats should be made available to schools and colleges on the same terms as standard papers. This should include the option to access past papers in electronic formats, including accessible PDFs, electronic files of braille papers, tactile diagrams and braille transcripts.
* Where there are very few or no past papers available in a modified format for a particular syllabus, awarding bodies should make reasonable efforts to supply past papers in an appropriate format for students to practice with.

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people with vision impairment, so they can reach their full potential in adult life. Many of our policy priorities are reflected in the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

RNIB Policy and Campaigns on 0207 391 2123 or campaigns@rnib.org.uk